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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR RICE'S JANUARY 12 MEETING WITH OUTGOING
UNIFIL FORCE COMMANDER GENERAL GRAZIANO

Classified By: Ambassador Rosemary DiCarlo for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Ambassador Rice met on January 12 with outgoing UNIFIL Force Commander General Graziano to thank him for his leadership and seek his candid assessment of the current situation. General Graziano emphasized that an opportunity exists to press for a permanent cease-fire given that all of Lebanon's political institutions are for the first time in three years fully operational. He highlighted the crucial role the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) will play in maintaining a permanent cease-fire and said that the best way to improve the situation in the south was to improve the LAF's capabilities. He urged the provision of non-lethal, basic equipment to the LAF and was certain it would not be transferred to Hizballah, which is already well-equipped. He stressed that the most immediate threat to Israel from southern Lebanon is posed by Palestinian terrorist groups, not Hizballah. He noted that a final agreement on an Israeli withdrawal from northern Ghajar is not likely in the next few weeks and urged that this effort not be allowed to fail. He voiced satisfaction with UNIFIL's mandate but noted several areas not covered by the mandate where problems had and could continue to arise, including the lack of a maritime line of separation. He noted that changes to UNIFIL's rules of engagement, i.e. if UNIFIL forces are to stand side-by-side with the LAF at checkpoints or board ships with the Lebanese Navy, would require the agreement of the Lebanese government.
END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Ambassador Rice met on January 12 with outgoing UNIFIL Force Commander Lieutenant General Claudio Graziano. (Note: Graziano will hand over command of UNIFIL to Spanish Major General Alberto Asarta on January 28. End note.) Ambassador Rice thanked General Graziano for his exceptional leadership of UNIFIL and pressed him for his candid assessment of the current situation. Graziano said he was pleased that UNIFIL has been able to maintain the cessation of hostilities but noted that much remains to be done, especially in terms of supporting the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) which is part of UNIFIL's core mandate. He highlighted that for the first time in three years Lebanon has all of its political institutions fully operational. He said that Lebanese Prime Minister Hariri has spoken for the first time about a permanent cease-fire. While Graziano noted that obtaining a cease-fire would be tricky without first having in place a Syrian-Israeli peace since the GOL would seek the return of all occupied Lebanese territory, an end to overflights, and a resolution of the Palestinian issue in Lebanon, he said there are possible ways to enlarge the tripartite process to encompass a broader set of bilateral Lebanese-Israeli issues to facilitate a permanent cease-fire. He emphasized that in the next two years something has to change -- either there has to be significant progress toward a permanent cease-fire or there will be reductions in UNIFIL force strength (through the departure of key troop contributors, i.e. European) to pre-2006 levels and operational capabilities. (Note: Graziano did confirm during the meeting that Italy would only be withdrawing its headquarters company of 220 personnel from UNIFIL, not its

larger operational force contribution. End note.)

LAF crucial to permanent cease-fire

13. (C) General Graziano stressed that the LAF are crucial to a permanent cease-fire and they continue to lack the necessary capabilities. He underscored that the only way to improve the situation in the south is to improve the LAF. He said this can be done so as to not strengthen Hizballah because the LAF lacks the basic equipment that Hizballah has. He highlighted the LAF's non-lethal equipment needs, such as night vision goggles and secure telecommunications equipment. He said that UNIFIL, not the LAF, found the explosives cache on December 26 near al-Khiyam because it has thermal equipment. He commented that the LAF communicates via regular mobile phones. Graziano stressed to Ambassador Rice and, in a separate discussion with the New York-based UNIFIL Strategic Military Cell (SMC), that the immediate threat to Israel from southern Lebanon is from Palestinian terrorist groups, not from Hizballah. Hizballah, he said, currently appears to be focused on storing its weapons and pushing for an aura of political credibility, and on not using its weapons and then facing the potential loss of those weapons.

Ghajar - must follow through on this

14. (C) While Graziano has been pressing to complete an Israeli withdrawal from northern Ghajar before the end of his tenure, he said he did not foresee "a solution to Ghajar" in the next few weeks. He commented that while "regular law and

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order policing" is not in UNIFIL's mandate, UNIFIL is prepared to do so in northern Ghajar in order to effect an Israeli withdrawal. The main sticking point, he said, is reassuring the Israeli government (GOI) that UNIFIL will not be pulled out and the area handed over to the Lebanese government without GOI agreement. Graziano said that UNIFIL cannot really offer such a guarantee but the Security Council could. Graziano underscored that the USG and the Council should not let there be a "failure on Ghajar."

Mandate issues

15. (C) Graziano said he continues to feel that UNIFIL's mandate is satisfactory because he does not think the Lebanese government (GOL) would permit a Chapter Seven mandate. He did note several areas where UNIFIL has been drawn into issues without having a clear mandate, including last summer's incidents at Kfar Shouba. He noted that there are growing concerns about the lack of a defined maritime "Blue Line" since the current "buoy line" was established by Israel without Lebanese or UN agreement. Graziano said a serious dispute could only be a matter of time. He also noted the possibility of offshore gas reserves which may also drive the need to demarcate a maritime line of separation.

Rules of engagement

16. (C) When pressed on UNIFIL's rules of engagement (ROE), Graziano admitted that they are circumscribed because of GOL preference. UNIFIL troops are not side-by-side with LAF troops at checkpoints since the LAF has been given the sovereign task of manning those checkpoints, not UNIFIL. UNIFIL may only search vehicles/houses with the LAF when they have evidence that arms or other threats may be contained therein. (Comment: If we would like to see a more active UNIFIL presence at checkpoints, even if only as an observer, we would likely need to seek the GOL's acquiescence in revising the ROE. End comment.) In terms of the Maritime Task Force (MTF), Graziano noted that since it was established at the invitation of the GOL, the ROE were

established by the GOL. As a result, the MTF may hail ships but does not board any ships to inspect them. This is only done by the Lebanese Navy.

17. (C) Graziano also noted that the ROE do not provide for the use of UAVs. UNIFIL forces use UAVs for force protection but not to further UNIFIL mission objectives since there is no provision in the ROE for UAVs for that purpose. Graziano did agree that the ROE could be changed to include UAVs but the GOL would have to agree to such a change. He noted that the GOL has been skittish about the use of UAVs. In fact, he noted that the LAF has Raven UAVs but are not flying them in the south. Graziano noted that the LAF general in charge of equipment has commented to him that he will not send certain equipment, i.e., sniper rifles, to the south because he does not want to be criticized by the IDF.

Maritime Task Force

18. (C) In addition to the previous comments on the need to delineate an agreed maritime line of separation, Graziano noted that IDF officials have commented to him that they are pleased with the Maritime Task Force (MTF). They believe it does serve as a deterrent, though they would prefer that it have the ability to inspect ships at sea. Graziano emphasized that the MTF is the only fleet regularly at sea in the area since the Lebanese Navy does not have the capability for longer-term cruises, especially in the winter months. He noted that the MTF is down to six vessels and must have at least two frigates in order to properly hail vessels. He urged that a European ship continue to be the flag ship of the MTF so that the MTF continues to have more of a "NATO look" to it.

RICE